Castlemaine Naturalist

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Spotted Pardalote - Photo by Noel Young

Nick Layne - The Loddon River

Tony Morton

At our July meeting Nick Layne, of the North Central Catchment Management Authority, treated us to a very comprehensive overview of our closest river, the Loddon. From its source at Bullarto South, near Trentham, to where it empties into the Little Murray, it winds its six hundred kilometres (which make it the second longest river in Victoria), flowing generally North, through the Wombat State Forest, Guildford, Newstead, two reservoirs (the Cairn Curran and the Laanecoorie), Newbridge, Bridgewater and Kerang, by which time the often clear water of the Loddon is made turbid by the waters of the Murray.

With the help of photographs we were shown the many different aspects of the river as it makes its long journey. When it passes through farmland its banks are trampled by stock and brutally infested by weeds. In the thick canopy of the forest, however, the pristine riparian vegetation returns, there are no weeds, the river is clear; there are fish and even the rare platypus (near Serpentine). The river passed from candlebark country through to the redgums and blackbox nearer the Murray.

Other photos showed us some beautiful spots along the river. The magnificent Loddon Falls, for instance, originally a geological reserve, and most striking with its organ-pipe-like stone structures and the 'hanging baskets' of natural vegetation perched high among them.

Water is still scarce in the river, despite our recent good rain. The reservoirs, Nick told us, will need years of higher rainfall before the land becomes saturated and they can properly fill.

It seemed to me that the Authority has quite a few problems facing it that Nick very sensibly did not dwell on. It is the landowners' responsibility to control weeds. What can be done about the irresponsible landowner who doesn't? Or about the uncaring farmer (fewer and fewer now, happily), whose stock has traditionally used the river as a mere convenience? What if the DSE, fearing wildfire, decide to burn

the few remaining spots of comparatively untouched bushland? The vast amount of evaporation of water caused in the shallower reservoirs is also a concern.

Nick finished his talk by showing us some lovely photographs of beautiful areas in Northern Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. Here is an enthusiastic and knowledgeable young man who loves Nature and the Australian bush and who is in accord with the present movement towards conserving and restoring what is left to us. If there are others like him who are working for the various Authorities I feel that we can be assured that the future of our beautiful countryside is in good hands.

Yamba and the long Way Home. Part 1.

Rita Mills

How do I condense a month plus trip into a short article? For the first part I don't think there were many more birds than we've seen on the last two trips up to Grafton, but the country was generally looking much healthier after rain and/or flood. Most of the birds seen were around water, and I suspect the reason we didn't see a lot is that there was plenty of water and feed well away from the roadsides. For some reason when we did see Apostlebirds they were in quite large flocks. Do they get together like Choughs at certain times of year, too?

The first real bird experience came as we passed Nigel's place on the South Gap - there were lots of Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, and other birds, at his gate and around the house. They certainly know where they are welcome!

The lake across the road from our Motel in Jerilderie was also a special spot. i spent about an hour on a cold morning before breakfast walking with my binoculars, spotting grebes, ducks, flights of Ibis, and Galahs sitting in the trees sunning themselves.

For me the highlight of our full day at Temora was our afternoon's drive along some back roads, and having a Wedgetail rise up off the side of the road in front of us. What magnificent birds they are. Their size always amazes me. Doug, I think, preferred our morning with different birds, at the Air Museum.

We had morning tea at Mullaley a couple of days later, and I was bemoaning the fact that there were fewer birds than usual at the spot, when a flock of Superb Parrots flew over. We saw several more on the Bingara Road later in the day. I noted in my diary that the valley where Manila, Barabba and Bingara lie was the driest area we'd seen, and even though we eventually drove through what is considered semi desert, it still wasn't as dry as this area this year.

At the Glenburn Tourist Park in Glen Innes I added Tasmanian Thornbills and a Northern Yellow Robin to my list. This is the ideal park, in my opinion, for anyone interested in nature, but the resident rabbits are a bit cheeky. The Park is a bit out of town to the South. Set among granite rocks it has a walk down to the creek behind, which is overgrown with all sorts of ferals and non-ferals admittedly, but if you like to just sit, on the grass, or one of the seats, or the rocks you'll see lots of little birds and it's very peaceful.

A couple of days later, and we were at Yamba at last, two days early for the Workshop I was attending. The unit we had taken for a fortnight was situated a very short stroll to the Main Beach and on our second evening's stroll I spotted some strange waves? splashes? out towards the horizon. Checking with my binoculars I confirmed that they really were being made by Humpback Whales breaching, spouting, and just rising to the surface at times. We went back up on the height above the beach and continued to watch, when one of the local women told us excitedly that these were the first whales for the season. The count in Sydney was done a week later. I wonder how many they missed?

Some of the sights I enjoyed at Yamba: Gannets fishing, Rainbow Lorikeets feeding in matching Grevilleas, Silver Gulls and Terns reflected in the wet sand at Turner's beach, a Willie Wagtail which flirted around our feet while we ate an icecream, hoping for crumbs, the light through the young leaves of an unusual vine (could have been a feral!) in the littoral vegetation, a yellow flower looking rather like a large Guinea-flower, again in the littoral vegetation, seeing the Scaly-breasted Lorikeets at Angourie, a few kilometres south of Yamba, the Pheasant Coucal that was trying hard to hide in some very inadequate cover as we walked along the cliff top, and the pair of Figbirds that just huddled down on a branch because they were probably as cold as we were! (Yamba had its coldest temperatures ever recorded while we were there - 13 and 14 degrees), the Intermediate Egrets fishing in the swamps, the Spangled Drongo sitting on the balcony of one of the Holiday Accomodation units, the... I think I'd better stop there.

We only saw one Red Wattlebird, but Brush Wattlebirds were common, and I decided all our missing Willie Wagtails are all up around there, and in Southern Queensland.

After a most enjoyable week on the road, followed by the two at and around Yamba, we set off for home at last, heading North and West, as far west as Thargominda, in SW Queensland, but more of that later.

CFNC Plant Brochure Launch

Denis Hurley

On the evening of 22nd July, there was standing room only as a crowd of more than 70 eager locals filled the Ray Bradfield Room to welcome the launch of our new colour brochure, "*Indigenous Plants of Castlemaine and Surrounds*". Some 14 months in development, the concept was a first for Castlemaine and is built on the design of a similar one from the Leigh Catchment.

The brochure has 84 high quality colour prints using images from CFNC members and other talented local photographers. We are also indebted to Leon Costermans for allowing us to include 12 of his sketches of trees found in the district.

Committee member and volunteer Richard Piesse acknowledged the Dja Dja Wurrung as original stewards of this land, stating that it is a privilege to live in Djaara country. He introduced the Mayor, Philip Schier who said that the brochure would be of interest to Council, locals and visitors as an educational tool.

Our secretary George Broadway introduced guest speaker John Landy, AC, CVO, MBE, past governor of Victoria and a long-time field naturalist himself. He described the original coverage of box ironbark country in Victoria as stretching from Wodonga to Stawell, and reminded us all that only 15% remains. He also outlined the challenges of needing to accommodate an increasing population for the region while preserving and restoring box ironbark habitat. Reflecting on previous migration into the

region, he commented that the knowledge of the natural cycles of the flora and fauna was hard-learned by the more recent inhabitants but was part of the everyday life of the Dja Dja Wurrung.

The Norman Wettenhall Foundation was a major sponsor of the project. Beth Mellick, executive officer, was recognized as a driving force behind the production of the brochure and of the very successful launch, including the organization of light refreshments supplied by local provenders. Beth also organized a thank you gift for John Landy, which was handed over by CFNC President Denis Hurley who spoke of the enormous talent in the room and the region, and the difficulty of selecting from the wide number of photos available for the brochure .

Above: John Landy addressing a packed room.

Left: Anne van Gemert and Rita Mills examine the indigenous plant brochure

Thank you to Beth Mellick for supplying the photos for this article.

Other key funders and supporters of the brochure include North Central Catchment Management Authority, Connecting Country, Friends of the Box Ironbark Forests, Mount Alexander Shire Council and the Department of Sustainability and Environment. Bundles of brochures have been distributed to landcare and other groups in the Shire.

These pocket-sized, water-resistant brochures are available at $2 each from various outlets including the Information Centre in Mostyn Street. Money raised from the sales will be put towards a reprint.

A request to all members

Your articles and observations are needed -

It is obvious from time to time, that material to fill the Newsletter is rather scarce. Ideally, the focus of the clubs' newsletter is to record local natural history events, observations and club activities, but it is also a members forum, and we are always interested in members' observations on holiday trips in other places, or thoughts and opinions on matters of interest in relation to natural history.

If you are more of a photographer than a writer, photo 'observations' with a note of explanation are always welcome. Reproductions now are generally good quality, albeit limited to black and white owing to the high cost of colour printing. If you aren't yet "digitised" or can't email them (at reduced file size please) we can scan a print.

Compilation is done on a PC using "Open Office", so text not written in that word processor needs to be in a '.doc' file type such as Microsoft Word or a universal text file such as "rich text format" (.rtf) or text edit format (.txt) Most word processors will save files in these formats. If you can't supply an electronic file, hard copy is fine, preferably printed on A4 in a basic font like Ariel or Times New Roman (for OCR transfer) Short notes or observations may be handwritten (provided we can read it!) Mail or deliver to Noel Young, 9 Murphy St., Castlemaine (email address is on the back page)

If it is of interest to you, then it will be interesting to others

Observations

- At the meeting Tony Morton described a Wedge tailed Eagle crossing the road in front of the car
- Chris Timewell noted that there are a large number of Grey headed Fruit Bats feeding on Eucalypt blossoms in Bendigo, and roosting in the gardens.
- John Alexander reported a dozen Flame Robins as well as Hooded Robins along the Gully track at Welshmans Reef, and the sighting of Swift Parrots in the same area
- Denis Hurley notes Echidna activity on the side of a track
- Late July – Golden Wattles flowering along the railway line – Richard Piesse

- Mistletoe bird in the garden at Muckleford, a silky spider web draped over the mulch heap, and Greenhood orchids (two species) along the Red White and Blue track in the Muckleford forest – Natasha Harris
- Birds described to Rita Mills on a property in Elphinstone, match the description of Gang-gang Cockatoos!
- Shrub Violet flowering on the roadside at Erin Court near the Muckleford golf course – Debbie Worland
- July 21st in the bush at Troll Corner to Manchester Reef, plenty of birds, including Rufous and Golden Whistlers, Striated Pardalote and Spotted Pardalote (cover photo), Grey Shrike-thrush, Grey Fantail, Eastern and Crimson Rosellas, Yellow tufted, White naped, New Holland and Fuscous Honeyeaters, Eastern Spinebill, Thornbill sp., Blue Wrens, Choughs, and Fan-tailed Cuckoos calling – Noel Young

left – Ploughshare wattle *Acacia gunnii* at the Rise and Shine reserve, July 18
right - Shrub Violet *Hybanthus floribundus ;* Erin Court, August 2

- photos by Noel Young

Our traditional Wednesday Wildflower Walks will commence on September 15th, continuing each week through to October 13th

Those interested should meet at 4pm at the Duke street car park. Appointed leaders will decide on the best locations at the time.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme
August 2010

Fri August 13 meeting: EILEEN MCDONALD Bees
Sat August 14 field trip: The Whipstick Forest

Fri September 10 meeting: MALCOM CALDER
Sat September 11 field trip: Sales Track
Sept 15 Wednesday Wildflower Walks commence (4pm for 1 hr)

Fri October 8 meeting: GRAEME WATSON on Frogs

VISITORS ARE **WELCOME** AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm.
Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.
Business meetings - fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at Denis Hurley's; 20 Merrifield St., at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions for 2010
Ordinary membership: Single $27, Family $35
Pensioner or student: Single $24, Family $29
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

2010 Committee

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